

EDITOR'S MISCELLANY



THE subject of the training of nurses is being so generally commented upon in different magazines as well as medical journals that we purpose printing in this department clippings bearing upon the subject, both favorable and unfavorable to nursing interests, that our readers may be kept in touch with the trend of public opinion upon this subject. We shall not always comment upon such articles, believing that our readers are competent to separate the "wheat from the chaff" without assistance from the editor.

THE QUESTION OF THE HOUR.—When should the education of a nurse begin? The question is at present engaging considerable attention, and several hospitals—the Royal Infirmary, Glasgow, the London, and Guy's—have made experiments in preliminary courses, which can now be no longer considered tentative, but have in each case been found of proved benefit to pupil and institution alike.

But, though a step in the right direction, it is impossible that a few weeks' special instruction prior to entering the wards of a hospital for practical work are all that is necessary if the best results are to be attained. Heads of training-schools still complain of the overwhelming and increasing amount of instruction to be crowded into the three-years' course, and pupils, bewildered with theoretical instruction, with the novel domestic work, and the responsible duties in relation to the sick which are required of them, not unfrequently break down under the strain, and the probability is greatest in precisely those pupils whom it is most desirable to retain, namely, those of conscientious, sensitive, and finely balanced temperament. Who is to blame? So long as the majority of training-schools demand little or no evidence of general education they cannot be wholly exonerated from responsibility. The direct result of this lack of any educational standard in the nursing world is that girls of bright intelligence and good education gravitate to the professions of medicine and teaching, to the Civil Service, to secretarial and other similar work, while for the member of a family who shows no conspicuous ability for any particular walk in life the nursing world is considered to afford a promising opening. So superintendents of training-schools are on all sides complaining that the quality of the "raw material" which is available for training is deteriorating, with the result that the finished product is deteriorating also.

But it is not the nurse-training schools which are primarily to blame. To place the responsibility on the right shoulders we must go farther back, that is, to the time when the embryo pupil-nurse is still at school.

How many parents take the education of their girls seriously? Thanks to the efforts of educationalists, more than to the demands of parents, many high schools for girls now afford cheap and excellent educational facilities. But, still, the education a girl receives is determined more by the exigencies of a local examination and the decision of the head mistress as to how many and which subjects she must take up in order to be able to obtain a sufficient number of marks to come out in an honor class, and so bring credit upon her teacher, than by any thought of her subsequent career.

In the case of a boy, on the contrary, by the time he is fourteen or fifteen it is necessary that he should decide on a profession, and subsequently his studies are directed accordingly.

It is just this direction which would be of the utmost value to a girl and which is almost wholly lacking; consequently, as a rule diligently, but more or less aimlessly, she pursues her studies until the age of seventeen or eighteen, when she is supposed to be "finished," and if she is not compelled to earn her living she returns home, when, if she does not happen to be of a studious turn of mind and to keep up a habit of reading, she speedily forgets much of the limited amount of knowledge she has acquired.

It is an extraordinary fact that many parents, while they would consider themselves falling short of their parental duty if they did not equip their sons for the battle of life by educating them to earn their own living, feel no such responsibility with regard to their daughters. Yet, setting aside the fact that most women when they arrive at adult life are happier in a sphere of their own, it parents consider the future seriously at all they must realize that nowadays it is essential for most girls to have a means of livelihood. The parents who can settle on their daughters a sufficient sum to bring them in an income of at least one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty pounds per annum are comparatively few; in most cases all the available capital has gone in the education of the boys. But if they cannot do this, then it is essential that the girls should go out into the world to earn their own living if they are not to be condemned to penury in middle life and old age. It is no use their attempting to make a living then. The struggle is hard enough for expert workers; the labor market has no place for untrained middle-aged women.

There is, of course, another alternative, namely, marriage. It looms large in the horizon of most parents in their calculations with regard to their daughters, and is responsible for much of their apparent irresponsibility with regard to the future of girls. Marriage is natural and right; they say.

Granted that a happy marriage, both for men and women, is desirable, it is surely unwise to base so important a decision as that of a girl's future on her chances of matrimony. Besides, it does not need elaborate calculations to know that, in this country at least, for many women matrimony is an impossibility. Moreover, which is the more likely to make a success of marriage—the girl who has a profession at her back, and who therefore seriously considers the step she is taking before giving up a life full of interests and happiness, or the one who has been taught to look forward to matrimony as the one means of providing herself with an assured income?

Until women place marriage on the same plane as men as an influence in determining their career, so long shall we have girls accepting their first offer of marriage as the lesser choice of evils, and the inevitable result in many cases will be unhappiness.

Putting marriage, then, out of the question for the time being, and assuming that a girl has an inclination towards nursing, how can her education be directed so as to be of use to her subsequently? By all means let it include one or more foreign languages. To the private nurse nowadays French is a valuable asset. Then rudimentary Latin will also be of great use to her. She is required, as a nurse, to be able to read the patients' head-boards intelligently; and the directions as to prescriptions, though they may not be couched in classical terms, are still in Latin. Anatomy, physiology, hygiene, economics as they affect the com-

munity, and bacteriology may also with advantage be included in her studies. Do you say that this is too much to require of her, and that you like your girl to be practical? Then, oh mother! see to it that she can turn out a room, that she knows how to handle a broom, to keep glass and china dainty and bright, and that she can cook an appetizing meal. None of these accomplishments, as a rule, does the daughter of the domestic woman possess. They all have to be taught her in the time which should be devoted to special training. See to it, moreover, that she is expert with her needle. The modern girl, as a rule, is not. Yet she must be deft-handed if she is to pad splints properly, to prepare the many dressings now required in hospitals, and to keep ward linen in good order. In short, give her a thoroughly practical education, and when she enters a nurse-training school she will be able to profit to the full by the professional education she receives, and go on to higher things. Is it too much to hope that, if she aspire to the superintendence of a large nurse-training school, in days to come she will need a university degree as well as a teacher's diploma? Training-schools for nurses are essentially educational centres, and all the prizes in the educational world are held by women having a university degree or its equivalent. If the authorities of our great nurse-training schools let it be known that, other things being equal, candidates for the post of matron holding a university degree would have precedence, they would not only eliminate many candidates from a lengthy list, but would also obtain a woman of culture—surely a great desideratum—as their superintendent of nursing, and, further, they would place their nursing-school on its rightful plane, namely, on the educational one.—MARGARET BREAY, in *British Journal of Nursing*.

To the Editor of Charities:

During the past year a number of different private hospitals of the city have been reported as in great financial straits, due largely to the increased cost of supplies and the considerable expense incident to the installation of modern hospital appliances. It is stated in this connection that the second largest item in the expense of a modern hospital is the cost of training nurses, as under the present arrangement in most public and private hospitals a nurse in training receives maintenance and a pittance of from eight to fifteen dollars per month for clothing, books, and incidentals. In view of the increased number of applications for admission to the best training-schools in the city, the better remuneration paid nurses in private practice at the present time, and the financial condition of the hospitals, it would seem timely to consider whether any saving might be effected in the cost of the nurses' training-schools without impairing the standing and efficiency of these schools. If the small allowance given each nurse for incidentals could be dispensed with, the total saving to a training-school of seventy-five nurses would be from seven thousand to eight thousand dollars per year.

If this argument from economy were the only one in favor of this proposition, the wisdom of the change would be exceedingly doubtful, but it is also urged that this change would place the training-schools on the footing of an educational rather than a charitable institution, and would have the effect of raising the standard of the school and increasing the independence of the students. Now that nursing is recognized as a profession and attracts women who sometimes have either means or social position or both, it is possible that the small monthly stipend could be dispensed with in most instances. There would probably be a